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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 STOCKHOLM 000198

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [SCUL](#) [ECPS](#) [EINT](#) [PINS](#) [PROP](#) [KPAO](#) [KMDR](#)
SW
SUBJECT: SWEDISH GOV'T PRESSURES COMPANY TO SHUT DOWN
WEBSITE WITH MOHAMMED CARTOONS

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¶1. (U) Summary. On February 9 a Swedish internet company shut down a small, right-wing political party website that featured the Jyllands-Posten Mohammed cartoons and planned to publish additional ones. The Swedish government, which beforehand had cautioned the company on the danger the images posed to Swedish lives and interests, denies it forced the shut-down. The web-site editor, and associated political party secretary disagree, accusing the government of improper interference with the freedom of expression. The Foreign Minister in a February 9 official statement characterized the website's actions as "provocation," and apologized for the existence of Swedish extremists "who insult other peoples religion." The Minister, in comments to the press the same day, expressed government fears of the potential reaction in the Middle East and beyond to the website's publication of the cartoons. End Summary.

Website Shut Down After Caution From MFA, Police

¶2. (U) On February 10 Sweden's domestic media gave prominent coverage to the shutting down of the far-right party Sverigedemokraterna (SD) website, which had published drawings of the prophet Mohammed. The site -- [www.sd-kurien.info](#) -- was shut down late on February 9, after Sweden's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Swedish Security Police (SAPO) contacted the webhost. Sweden's leading daily paper Dagen's Nyheter noted that SAPO had for a long time been monitoring the SD site content and considered that, in light of the recent violence spurred by the Mohammed cartoon controversy, it presented a danger for Sweden and Swedes abroad. The paper quotes SAPO Chief Klas Bergenstrand as stating "We have had contact with the web host and presented our threat assessment, the content of which is secret." The news story quotes an executive in the web host company, Levonline, as stating that "We determined that it was best (to shut down the site) after SAPO and the Foreign Ministry contacted us."

ForMin Apologizes for Existence of Swedish Extremists;

¶3. (U) Foreign Minister Freivalds on February 9 issued an official statement "On the Provocation by SD-Kurien," criticizing Sverigedemokraterna for arranging a competition for cartoons depicting caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed. In the statement Freivalds noted "I will defend freedom of

the press no matter what the circumstances, but I strongly condemn the provocation by SD-Kurien. It displays a complete lack of respect." Freivalds stated "It is deplorable that a small group of extremists expose Swedish citizens and Swedish interests to clear danger." She then formally apologized, "I apologize that there are a few individuals in Sweden who are so callous and who consciously insult other people's religion." The same day Freivalds on February 9 told Radio Sweden that the SD-Kurirens website contained the cartoons that appeared in Denmark's Jyllands-Posten, and an additional one depicting Mohammed looking in a mirror, with the reflection's eyes blocked out by a banner reading "Mohammed's self censorship." SD-Kurien intended to publish the yet-unseen competition drawings both on-line and in its bi-monthly party newspaper's March edition.

¶4. (U) Background. Sverigedemokraterna is a right-wing, nationalist party that won 1.4 percent of the vote in the last (2002) general election -- far below the 4 percent threshold necessary to gain seats in parliament. SD's party newspaper, SD-Kurien, is published bi-monthly in the city of Lund in the south of the country.

Fears Sweden's Involvement in Cartoon Controversy

¶5. (U) Freivald's statement, and the Foreign Ministry and SAPO contact with SD's webhost, follow media reports in the Middle East earlier this week commenting on the SD cartoon competition. On February 7 Israel's Yedioth Group's Ynet News posted an online story about the SD contest. On February 8 the Middle East's Al Bawaba Group news website posted an article stating "a rightist Swedish newspaper on Tuesday launched a new competition of drawings on the profit Mohammed." The Al Bawaba piece commented: "Thus far Sweden has remained relatively clear of the cartoon row. Tuesday's developments will likely change this, however, with several Muslim groups already calling for the destruction of

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SD-Kurien." The Dagens Nyheter article (noted above) said the Syrian government had called in Sweden's ambassador to complain about this issue. It quoted Foreign Minister Freivalds as commenting that in fact several media outlets in the Middle East have reported that "a large Swedish newspaper" publicized the Mohammed caricatures. In the February 9 interview with Radio Sweden, Freivalds said the SD story had drawn a reaction from Damascus, and expressed fear that similar reactions would come from other directions.

Minister Denies Gov't Forced Shut-down; Editor, Party Sec. See Otherwise

¶6. (U) Freivalds has since denied (in an interview with Radio Sweden) media allegations that the government obliged Levonline to shut down the SD site. She has stated that the MFA and Police only informed Levonline of the consequences dissemination of the images could have for Swedish interests, and that the company subsequently made its own decision to shut down the site. SD-Kurien chief editor Richard Jomshof told Radion Sweden that SD is a legal party that has broken no Swedish laws. He expressed surprise and dismay that the Foreign Ministry would contact a private internet company about a political party website operating within the law. SD party secretary Bjorn Soder told Sweden's TT news service that he believes "political powers" are behind the decision to shut down the website.

Comment

¶7. (SBU) As this issue plays itself out we will undoubtedly gain a clearer understanding of the actions and motivations of the parties involved. For now, however, it appears that the authorities -- highly fearful of Muslim extremist

reaction and consequent threat to Swedish lives and interests
around the globe -- pressed Levonline to shut down the SD
party website.
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